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*Albert B. Witton Esq.
with H. B. Witton Esq.*

THE HAMILTON ASSOCIATION.

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EARLY PRINTING, PRINTERS AND BOOKS.

Read before the Hamilton Association, December 21st, 1893.

BY H. B. WITTON, SR.

Who invented the art of printing with movable cast metallic types, and the kindred enquiry where that art was first carried into actual use, have long been and still are, attractive subjects of investigation. Few questions have been debated more zealously, for so long a time, or by more disputants. For nearly four hundred years, quest of the truth as to where, when, and by whom this great art of the fifteenth century was introduced; and what beyond cavil are the particulars of its parentage and infancy, has been persistently made: and in all parts of the civilized world searchers have joined in pursuit of evidence. Of books written on this subject, the titles alone fill a volume. The works themselves constitute a library. At various times, chief honors have been claimed for different cities where early printing was done, and on behalf of several of the early printers. Recent controversy on this subject has scarcely gone beyond the claims of Coster and Haarlem on one side, and those of Gutenberg, with his associates Fust and Schoeffer, and Mainz on the other. Former competitors have been withdrawn from the contest, and discussion is narrowed to the merits of these claimants. The dispute is also further condensed, as both sides now ignore, as rubbish worthless to serve the cause of honest criticism, documents of questionable authenticity that formerly obtained credence.

Von der Linde, Madden, Blades, Hessels and DeVinnie are but a few of the authors who, of late years, have written on the subject of early printing. These writers are specialists of acknowledged merit, whose opinions are the outcome of diversified technical knowledge of typography, and of prolonged study of original fifteenth century documents upon which the principal evidence concerning the invention of printing rests. On this subject all these authors have written at considerable length. As each has pursued his studies in his own way, their books are marked by strong national

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and individual characteristics ; and their conclusions differ as much as do their methods of investigation. Von der Linde unhesitatingly pronounces for Gutenberg, and ridicules all claims for Coster as legendary and fictitious. Hessels, in 1871, translated Von der Linde's book, "The Haarlem Legend of the Invention of Printing." At that time translator and author were in agreement, but after studying for three years, the chief original documents bearing on the subject, Hessels' views changed, and he has since become Von der Linde's strong antagonist. Mr. Hessels' faith in the validity of Coster's claim strengthened as his belief in Gutenberg waned. In 1882 he wrote the book entitled "Gutenberg ; Was He the Inventor of Printing?" and in 1887 he issued a smaller work with the pronounced title "Haarlem, the Birthplace of Printing, not Mainz." In his exhaustive article on early typography, written for Vol. XXIII of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Mr. Hessels concludes as the case stands, "there is no choice but to credit Coster with the invention of printing with movable types at Haarlem about the year 1445." Blades, Madden and DeVinne have contributed original information to the controversy, but their books echo more or less distinctly the stronger utterances of either Von der Linde or Hessels. In the works by these two authors, the leading facts relating to early printing are forcibly stated : new light is thrown into some of the dark corners ; and if from either standpoint a finished picture is not at present a possibility ; nevertheless good sketches in firm outline are presented by both.

In his essay on Jean Paul Richter, Carlyle says : "Actual facts are nowise so simply related to each other as parent and offspring are ; every single event is the offspring not of one but of all other events prior or contemporaneous." Fortunately the truth, somewhat oracularly asserted by Carlyle, is powerless to disturb men's minds. Brevity of life and limitation of human faculties make it impossible to trace even the greatest events through more than a few steps of their entangled unrestricted relationship. To that rule the invention of printing is no exception. Its kindred arts are dimly seen through the mists of the past, and immediate details of its origin are imperfectly recorded. Block books, pictures of saints, and ornaments stamped on textile fabrics and church vestments, if not the direct progenitors of printing, are near relations, were close

forerunners of that art, and give the best clue by which its history can be traced. They are legitimate next of kin to the art of printing books; seals and brands for identification of cattle, slaves and felons, are but poor and distant relations. These are the oldest and only kindred to printing Europe can boast. The far east has cognate arts of great antiquity and interest.

Among the saint pictures—*Helgen* or *Heiligen*—which helped to pave the way for printed books, the engraving of St. Christopher, found in 1769, by Heineken, inside the cover of a manuscript at the Chartreuse Convent of Buxheim, in Suabia, stands first. It is a print from a knife engraving, cut in wood used plank-wise; and after the outline drawing was printed, it was colored by hand or stencil. It is one of the treasures of Earl Spencer's collection, lately bought at a cost of nearly a quarter of a million pounds sterling for the whole library by the widow of Mr. John Rylands for presentation to the City of Manchester. Mr. W. J. Linton gives a facsimile of this print, as a frontispiece to his great work "The Masters of Wood Engraving." It is the earliest dated wood engraving known. Under the picture is engraved the date, 1423, and a Latin couplet, near the date, gives the beholder assurance:

Christoferi faciem die quacunque tueris
Illa nempedie morte mala non morieris.
"That day thou Christopher's face shall see,
No evil death shall happen thee."

Apart from its historical worth, this print has a charm from the naive manner in which the devout old artist tells the legend of St. Christopher. More than twice the stature of common men, he was bound to serve the most powerful ruler on earth. On the advice of a holy man, he undertook to carry pilgrims across a certain stream. One day a child came to be carried over. The gigantic ferryman was surprised that the weight of the little one should be so heavy a burden; and on looking up to learn the reason, he is told that the child borne on his shoulders is the Lord of All, and receives His blessing. The rude picture is full of life. The great strength of the saint is seen at a glance from the palm tree he used as a staff. His immense stature is evident by comparing him with the hermit at his shrine, of whom even the timid rabbit is not afraid; or with

the miller, taking grain on his ass's back to the mill with the quaint old water-wheel ; or with the burly peasant, carrying on his own back from the mill a sack of meal to his distant cottage. The benignity of the infant Saviour who carries the world in his hand, and the fear, humility and astonishment on the upturned face of St. Christopher, are admirably expressed.

Block-books, Xylographs as they are called, were the immediate heralds of printing with types. For the most part they were printed with a brownish-grey ink, in which there was little or no oil ; and in a similar way to the saint pictures. Some of the block-books had no text ; others had no pictures ; but most of the copies known have both text and pictures. Some of them are tinted with colour, after the manner of the St. Christopher, others are uncoloured. The Spencer Library contains fourteen block-books ; and Mr. Hessels says twenty of German and ten of Netherlandish origin are known. One of the largest block-books, that of the *Apocalypse*, or revelations to St. John, has fifty leaves printed on one side only. The *Biblia Pauperum*, the best-known of these books, has forty leaves, on which are one hundred and twenty pictures illustrating as many dramatic scenes from Bible history. Verses of scripture and skeleton sermons make up a printed text on each page. Although called the Bible of the poor, it is said, the book was designed to aid the less learned of the clergy, and was really the *Biblia pauperum predicatorum*.

In museums and great libraries, a few playing cards, pictures of saints, and block-books have been preserved from times prior to the middle of the fifteenth century. Competent authorities report that these are imprints from pictures and writing engraved on blocks cut plank-wise or parallel with the grain of the wood ; and were taken on paper pressed with a roller, or by friction, to receive the print, just as an engraver takes trial proofs of his work to-day. They were no doubt the work of monks or of professional scribes ; for so far as classical writings were preserved at all, they were preserved by monastics ; and monks also furnished manuscript books of amusement, instruction, and devotion, to the few who could profit by their use. Whether we have had left to us full record of the tentative stages through which the art of printing passed during the first half of the fifteenth century is more than doubtful. As D'Israeli, the

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elder, in almost the exact words of Daunou, suggests, we may be too far from the invention of printing ever to know the details of its discovery, and too near to predict with certainty what will be its future results.

The early printed book of most general interest is the *Bible Mazarine*. Singularly enough that Bible had been forgotten until De Bure, little more than a hundred years ago, found a copy among the books formerly owned by the Cardinal Mazarin. Fifty years after De Bure's discovery twenty copies were known, and at present thirty copies are known to exist. Mr. Quaritch, the London bookseller, says that ten copies of the Mazarine Bible have been sold in England since the year 1847, and that at different times five of these were in his own possession. For Sir John Thorold's copy, sold in 1884, Mr. Quaritch paid £3,900. There are two copies in the Library of the British Museum—one printed on paper, the other on vellum; for although paper was known to civilized Europe at least two hundred years before the invention of printing, it was not made in large quantities, and vellum was preferred by scribes and illuminators for their rarer and costlier purposes. It is estimated that three hundred sheep skins were used for a single copy of the Mazarine Bible. In the British Museum copy, the titles to each book, chapter, and psalm, and all the large initial letters, were rubricated by hand. That was often done in incunabala—as books dating from the infancy of printing are called—and as illustrators of books in those days were not all scholars, a director or small letter was often printed to show what initial should be painted in the space left. A Mazarine Bible in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, contains a note stating that Henricus Cremer, Vicar of St. Stephen's at Mainz, finished illuminating and binding that book on August 24th, 1456; a memorandum which incidentally helps to fix the date when the Bible was printed. The British Museum Official Catalogue describes the Mazarine Bible carefully in these words: "It contains six hundred and forty-one leaves printed in double columns, with forty-two lines to the column. It is probably the first large book, if not the first piece of printing of any size, executed by movable metal types. Between 1450 and 1452, Gutenberg is believed to have made experiments which resulted in the invention of printing with movable metal types

"The printing of this book probably commenced in or about 1452, "on the completion of Gutenberg's invention. Whether we are "justified in treating it as printed throughout by Gutenberg himself, "or should regard it as printed wholly or in part by Fust, who had "lent money to Gutenberg for the purpose of his invention, or by "Schoeffer who printed a *Donatus* with the same types, is a question "not yet fully answered, nor perhaps likely to be answered. There "are documents of the fifteenth century in which the invention is "ascribed variously to one or other of these three."

Next in importance among early printed books is a Bible containing two hundred and forty-one leaves more and six lines to the column less than the Mazarine Bible; and the first Mainz Psalter. The thirty-six line Bible, sometimes called the Pfister Bible, is scarcely less famous than the Mazarine Bible; and the Mainz Psalter, printed by Fust and Schoeffer in 1457, is the first book printed with a date. Of the Pfister, or thirty-six line Bible, not more than ten copies are known. Twenty-one copies of the Mainz Psalter are known. Nine are dated 1457 and twelve are dated 1459. Only a few are perfect; Brunet says the most beautiful copy is in the Imperial Library at Vienna. These psalters were sumptuously printed. Initial ornamental letters of many early-printed books were painted by hand. Those of the Mainz Psalters were printed; and for beauty of design, delicacy of colour, and careful printing they are said by artists and printers hardly to be surpassed in our times. Until lately they were thought to be wood engravings; but Mr. Linton combats that opinion, and says the ornamentation of the initial letter of the first psalm, the letter B covering a space more than three inches square, has a purity and delicacy of outline convincing to him that it was engraved on metal, and not on wood; and that it is beyond the wood engravers art of that day. The Mainz printers, besides their large books, also printed some smaller papers in the first years of their art. The list of their minor works accepted as unquestionably genuine hardly exceeds some Papal indulgences, a *Mahnung* against the Turks, a calendar, and copies from five or six editions of the favorite Latin primer of the day, called *Donatus*, after its author, a Latin rhetorician of the fourth century.

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decade of the art of printing were produced from at least four different kinds of types. Experts differ in opinion as to how these types were made, as much as they do in regard to who made them. Some believe with Fournier—a typefounder and engraver—that the Mainz Psalter was printed with wood letters; others equally competent to judge agree with DeVinne that “no book was ever printed “in Europe with small types of wood.” And there seems to be a balance of probability that these types were of metal, cast from pattern letters of wood in sand or clay, after the manner of working jewelry and trinkets at that time, and, that after being so cast, they were trimmed and finished by hand. In the Mainz Psalter different impressions of the same letter of the alphabet exhibit variations of form, readily detected by the practised eye. Such variety of form in the same letter may be inadequate proof the types used were wood or metal; but it does show that the making of types with a steel punch, and copper matrix to serve as a mould for type metal fusible at a lower temperature, was a step further on in the progress of the art.

Inscriptions—colophons—formerly placed at the end of books, used to give readers the information now printed on title-pages at their beginning. Of the books printed at Mainz, in the first decade of the art of printing, some have colophons informing the reader where they were produced and by whom; and that they were printed, and not written with reed, stylus, or pen. Of the inventor of the art of making books by such new method, nothing, however is said; on that point the oracles are dumb. The invention was hedged around and the art carried on with a view to secrecy; of that there is little ground for doubt. Publicity would have imperiled control of the new art, and might have reduced the monetary value of books produced in so innovating a manner. Early printed books were facsimiles of early manuscripts in every day use, and could hardly be distinguished from them. Mr. Blades relates that a few years since an English book-seller of experience and reputation unwittingly sold for half a crown, as an old manuscript, a book printed by Caxton, worth its weight in gold. Popular belief that Fust sold in Paris some of his early-printed Bibles as manuscripts, may not have been altogether without foundation. Be that as it may, name of producer, place, and details of origin were

omitted from the first printed Bibles ; and none of the earliest printed books gives any indication as to who invented the new art of printing.

It is disappointing that the first promoters of the art of printing books said so little concerning the novel inventions that brought their calling into existence. Some of the old printers were devoted to their craft ; many of them were fond of learning ; and their calling was to them an estimable means of livelihood. They were an inner circle, and knew more of the early stages through which the art of printing passed, and by whom its essential processes were invented than the outer world did. But the lips of the earliest craftsmen were sealed ; and if those of the second generation told the history of their art, they told it so badly, and each so eagerly pointed out his own favorite as the true inventor, that their assertions are less satisfactory than the reticence of their predecessors. On this subject even John Schoeffer equivocates. The books produced from his press during the twenty years he was a printer are double-tongued witnesses telling two versions of this story. John Schoeffer succeeded to the printing business of Fust and Schoeffer at Mainz. He was son of Peter Schoeffer, Fust's partner, and his mother was Fust's daughter. According to report she was given in marriage to Peter Schoeffer by Fust to consolidate the interests of the Mainz printing firm, and as an appreciative token from Fust of Schoeffer's services. Related as he was by ties of marriage and blood to Fust and Schoeffer, and as their immediate successor in business, John Schoeffer was likeliest of all men to know the respective inventive services of his predecessors to their common art, and of all men was in duty bound to see that his books said nothing about the invention of printing at variance with the exact truth. In 1505, soon after his father's death, in the dedication of his German edition of Livy to Maximilian, he says printing was invented at Mainz, " firstly by the ingenious Johann Gutenberg in 1450, and thereafter improved and made permanent by the diligence, cost and labors of John Fust and Peter Schoeffer " ; yet, in some of his other books, he says the author and inventor of the art of printing was his grandfather, John Fust. The words used are : " John Schoeffer, cujus Avus primus Artis impressoriæ fuit inventor et auctor."

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Official records of the time throw but a glimmer of light on the early history of printing. There is, however, record of the fact that Fust lent money to Gutenberg in 1449, and made a second advance three years after that date; that as surety for his loan he held claims on certain effects; that in November, 1455, he sought to recover with interest the monies advanced, and that the case was adjudged in his favor. The record of the suit refers to vellum, paper, ink, tools, the book, and workmen's wages. The chroniclers who wrote accounts of the doings of that day, content themselves with narrating concerning printing what was verbally told them by some of the German printers, who, after the siege of Mainz in 1462, carried their art throughout Europe. One of these most interesting paragraphs of hearsay evidence comes from William Fichet. He was not only a good scholar who had been elected rector of the University of Paris, but was an astute man of the world, whom Louis the XI employed in important negotiations, and who received credit for concluding peace with the Duke of Burgundy. He was an earnest patron of the new art of printing, and through his influence Gering, Krantz and Friburger, three German printers, established an office in Paris within the walls of the Sorbonne. In one of the early books from their press put in operation in 1470, there is printed a communication from Fichet, who says the friends of literature will be benefited by these new sort of printers, who, like warriors from the Trojan horse, are scattered abroad. And he adds; "In France the story is that a certain John Gutenberg, not far from Mainz, was the first inventor of the printing art by means of which books are made, not with a reed as of old, nor with a pen as in our days, but with metal letters, and that rapidly, evenly and elegantly."

The Cologne *Chronicle* contains a similar but more specific account. In a narrative comprising eighty lines of his book, the chronicler states that John Gutenberg, who was born at Strasburg, was the inventor of printing, at Mainz, in 1440; that after ten years experimenting and preliminary work, he commenced, at Mainz, in 1450, to print a Bible in Missal types; that while the art of printing in common use was invented at Mainz, a first prefigurement of that art was invented in Holland, in the Donatuses, formerly printed there; and though many wrongheaded men may say books were

printed in former times, what they say is untrue, and that no books printed in former times can be found in any country. The *Cologne Chronicle* bears the name of John Koelhof, Burger of Cologne; but the writer is unknown. It was written in 1499, and the writer enhances the interest of his account by stating that Ulrich Zell, who brought the art of printing to Cologne, and was at that time still a printer there, told him by word of mouth the beginning and progress of that art. Koelhof was himself a printer of note, and is credited with being first of the printers to introduce on each finished sheet the use of printed in lieu of written signatures as a guide for bookbinders. He commenced to print in Cologne in 1472, and as Zell arrived there from Mainz about ten years before that date, it is probable that Koelhof learned the art of printing from Zell himself. Other evidence of great volume, but much of it less tangible and direct, is adduced to sustain the contention; that the art of typography was first invented by Gutenberg, and was first practised at Mainz; that capital for carrying out Gutenberg's plans was furnished by Fust; that, tired at Gutenberg's delay, Fust took suit against him for the money loaned and gained judgment; and that the art was further completed and perfected by Schoeffer, who became Fust's partner.

This paper is not controversial; neither can it add aught by way of fact or argument to a dispute around which cluster the accumulated truths and prejudices of centuries. Its aim is but to cast a passing glance at the present phase of a controversy concerning the origin of an art, which, judged by its utility and results, is perhaps greatest of the arts found out by man. A controversy that has interested each succeeding generation from the sixteenth century till now; which retains its interest undiminished for more readers to day than ever before, and which bids fair to carry over a considerable remainder of unsettled particulars as an heirloom to the next generation; deserves attention, and is worth the trouble of looking at through the murky atmosphere surrounding both sides of the dispute. Uncertainty concerning the origin of printing is explained by the doubt surrounding discoveries made in this century. In inventions of chemistry, metallurgy, optics, and in those of the mechanical and industrial arts, the names of contesting inventors of our day are legion. Besides in medieval times, inventive genius in following up

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certain branches of research, had cautiously to grope its way well nigh in the gloom and seclusion of necromancy; but in the nineteenth century scientific societies, patent offices, public companies and the ubiquitous journalist, instantaneously photograph the daily work of the world, and its workers in every branch of science, art and industry.

On the Haarlem side of the question no books of Dutch printing, bearing name and date, between 1450 and 1460, can be produced. Some of the Dutch towns have preserved books printed at their presses in 1472-74; but the oldest dated book printed at Haarlem, is said to be one printed by John Andrea in 1483. There are books and fragments of printed books, said to be of earlier production than these, and which are pointed to in proof that Haarlem is the true birth place of printing; but, like some of the early productions of the Mainz press, they bear no name, place, nor date.

Numerous narratives of events, and statements of a minor kind, were collected by Meerman, and have been quoted by later writers in aid of the claim of Coster. Among these is the genealogy of the Costers, in the Town Hall at Haarlem; a history of printing, said to have been written by Van Zorn and lost in the Haarlem siege; and a statement from an Italian who had lived some years in Holland, that Gutenberg stole the art from Coster. But the most explicit and circumstantial claim for Coster and Haarlem was made in a work called, after the ancient name of Holland, Batavia, which was written by the Dutch savant Young, or Junius, as he was named, after the Latinizing fashion of the times. The Batavia was a posthumous work, published in 1538, thirteen years after the death of Junius and one hundred and thirty years after the production at Mainz of the psalter of 1457. The notable part of the statement by Junius is: That one hundred and twenty-five years before he wrote, Coster printed on paper for his grandchildren some letters cut from the bark of a beech tree; that, contemplating greater things, with his son-in-law's aid, he made an ink more glutinous than common ink, and printed with it the *Speculum nostrae Salvationis*. He then changed his types of wood for leaden types, and these were afterwards changed for types of tin; and, his business prospering, John, one of his servants—supposed to be Fust

—became his partner. This servant, after being taught, under oath, the secrets of the printing art, one Christmas Eve, when the Coster family were all at church, stole the whole of his master's printing apparatus, fled to Amsterdam, thence to Cologne, and finally established a printing office at Mainz, where he printed with his stolen types a grammar called *Doctrinale Alexandri Galli*, and the tracts of Hispanus. Junius adds that he writes what aged people worthy of credence told him; and that Galius, his tutor, and Taresius, who, it seems, was some time secretary to Erasmus, also informed him that one Cornelis, a bookbinder of Haarlem, eighty years old, also told them the same story. Few statements are on record for which such an array of names could be cited in censure or in commendation; and its appraisal runs the complete scale from historical fact to idle fiction. The records of Haarlem show the name of Cornelis, a bookbinder of that date, and two different families have had thrust on them the honor of Coster's lineage. The first Laurence, an innkeeper, it was found, died in 1439. His claim has been given up; but since 1870 the career of another Coster, of Haarlem, has been found to fit in part into the account by Junius, though Mr. Hessels admits some parts of that account are yet to be explained.

Chief interest in the Junius statement centres in the book Coster is said to have printed; and in the two books Junius says Coster's servant printed with the stolen types. The *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, credited to the Coster press, as its name implies, is a mirror shewing the Fall and Redemption of man. There are four early-printed editions of this book, two in Latin and two in Dutch. There is but little difference in these four editions; each contains a short introduction and fifty-eight leaves of wood cuts and text, printed only on one side of each leaf. Each engraving forms two pictures, comprising in all more than four hundred figures. The picture takes up the upper half of each leaf, and the text is printed in two columns beneath it. In one edition, twenty-four pages of both text and pictures are engraved; otherwise the engravings are on wood, and the printing is from movable metallic types. All the engravings are printed with brown ink, but in three of the four editions the text was separately printed in black ink. In all four editions the types are the same. Of the books said to have been printed with the stolen types, as yet no copy of the Hispanus Tracts

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has been claimed by the Costerians; but from the same types four editions of the *Doctrinale* mentioned, and six editions of the small Donatus grammar have been found. With subtle but somewhat strained reasoning, Mr. Hessels endeavors to show that altogether forty-seven Dutch printed books, or fragments of books, have been brought to light that were printed with the same types used for printing the *Speculum*, or with types so near akin as to be inseparable from them, and of these there are twenty-one editions of the Donatus grammar. It is further argued, these books are more archaic than the early Mainz books; and are a necessary link between the rudely-cut letters of the block books and the superb printing of Fust and Schoeffer. Moreover, these Donatus grammars printed with movable types like those used in the *Speculum*, are, it is urged, the veritable books spoken of in the Cologne *Chronicle* by Zell, in which prefigurement of the art of printing was first invented in Holland.

This point of the discussion necessarily hinges on the question whether the forty-seven books and fragments of books printed with type and in a manner more archaic than German type and printing, are older than the Mainz *Indulgence*, of 1454, and should, therefore, be historically placed before it. Waiving for the time positive affirmations pro and con, the answer of Wm. Blades—a friendly witness for Haarlem—made shortly before his death in 1890, is worth quoting. He says: "Honestly speaking, I think the direct proofs insufficient; but if we study the typographical evidence by the light of the Cologne *Chronicle*, the probabilities seem to me quite on the side of the *Costeriana*. * * The evidence on each side may be enlarged in the course of years, but so far as it goes at present it is strongly in favor of the first rude invention of moveable types in Holland by some one whose name may have been Coster. The claim of Gutenberg upon the respect of posterity rests on his great improvements—so great as to entitle him in a sense to be deemed the inventor—foremost in excellence if not first in time."

On behalf of Mainz it is contended that the Dutch school grammars which were the prefigurement—*vurbylding*—of the Mainz invention, were Xylographic or Block-book Donatuses; and to construe the reference in the *Chronicle* to them, to mean they were printed

by movable types, is to stultify and make meaningless the whole account given by Zell of the invention of printing. It is further urged, the art of printing with movable types could not have been practised in Holland without eliciting comment from artists and cultivated men of that time. Among other notables, Caxton and Erasmus both lived in the Low Countries during a good part of the latter half of the fifteenth century; and both credit Mainz with being the birth-place of printing. Yet Erasmus was a Hollander by birth; Caxton lived in Bruges a quarter of a century, and both were on such terms of personal intimacy with the printers of the time and were such admirers of the printing arts, that the invention, in Holland, of movable types could hardly have escaped their knowledge. It is admitted that no Block-book Donatus is known; perhaps school books of that day were more perishable than they generally have been, and now are. More diligent search than ever before will be made, and fifteenth century bindings and all likely lurking places will be ransacked for them, the types of the forty-seven Costeriana will also be subjected to systematic examination by experts, and by these and kindred means the enlarged evidence, considered by Mr. Blades necessary before passing final judgment, may yet be found.

By the year 1500 printing presses were at work throughout Europe in two hundred cities and towns. Jenson, Aldus Manutius, Koburger, Colard Mansion and Caxton are but a few of the more enthusiastic men whose names are on the bead roll of fifteenth century printers. Koburger, at Nuremburg, kept at work twenty-four presses and a hundred men. He printed twelve editions of the Latin Bible; and an illustrated German Bible said to be his masterpiece. Aldus Manutius followed close on the heels of Jenson at Venice, and made it a work of his life to spread a knowledge of the Greek classics. So well did he succeed in his task, that he sold a pocket edition of Greek authors at a price equivalent to fifty cents a volume; whereas, only thirty years before, the King of France, Louis XI., according to old bibliographers, had to pledge plate in security for a borrowed volume, and an Italian nobleman sold an estate to buy a Latin copy of Livy. What the Aldine printers did for Greek, the Elzevirs, at a later day, did for Latin literature. In Holland, chiefly at Leyden and Amsterdam,

fourteen members of the distinguished Elzevir family were printers and booksellers; and during one hundred and thirty consecutive years their presses sent forth twelve hundred editions, nine hundred and sixty-eight of which were Latin classics or modern authors who wrote in Latin.

But none of the old printers stands in such intimate relationship to English literature as William Caxton; and to English readers his name and books have charms exclusively their own. Caxton learned the printing art on the Continent, probably at Cologne, soon after the year 1471. Although direct testimony is lacking, it is probable that Veldner, Colard Mansion and Caxton worked together at Cologne in the same office, but under what master-printer is conjectural. Biographies of Caxton have, within a few years past, been written by Charles Knight and by Mr. Blades. To both the work was a labour of love, and both were printers who wrote with the enthusiasm of craftsmen for their art. Charles Knight was a pioneer in opening up the treasures of good literature to the masses, and was so advanced a printer, publisher and author as to be called the Caxton of the nineteenth century. His *Cyclopædia*, issued in penny numbers half a century ago—one of his many enterprises to popularize knowledge—cost for literary labour alone £40,000. Mr. Blades, in his life of England's first printer, has traced out and studied the productions of Caxton's press with a pious care unsurpassed by that of a Brahman for his texts; and his book, as it deserves to be, is already a classic. But Caxton left neither letters nor journals, and but scanty materials of any kind for a biographer to work upon; and his life is best known by his works, and by such glimpses of his contemporaries and his own personal experience as are given in the delightful introductions he wrote to his books. The date of Caxton's birth is usually stated to be 1412, but Mr. Blades thinks he was not born before 1422. His place of birth was in the weald of Kent, and, he says, there he studied English, where he doubts not is spoken as rude and broad English as in any place in England. He went to school; but whether in London or in a country school is not known. In the prologue to his *Life of Charles the Great*, he expresses his gratitude to God for the simple cunning according to which his translation has been made, adding: "I am also bounden to pray for my fader

"and moder's sows that in my youthe sette me to scole, by
"which I get my living I hope truly." After his school days
Caxton was apprenticed to Robert Large, a London mercer of
reputation, who was Lord Mayor in 1439.

Troublesome times in Caxton's youth were in store for England.
Abroad, war with France; at home, starvation and want among the
people; a fierce struggle between the nobles; deadly strife for the
crown between the Houses of York and Lancaster; and to complete
the list of national woe, there were faint, distant mutterings of that
storm of religious persecution which in the future would burst upon
the nation. Strange sights, foreign to modern life, arrested Caxton's
attention during his London apprenticeship. For three alternate
days, a dame of high degree, barefoot, taper in hand, clad in a sheet,
and followed in procession by Mayor and civic dignitaries, walked
the public streets, from the Thames to St. Paul's, in penance for
sorceries with the witch of Eye; heads of Kentish "risers" were
stuck on poles on London Bridge; and an aged vicar of eighty
years was degraded from his priesthood and burnt on Tower hill for
Lollardism. Large died before Caxton's apprenticeship ended; and
the apprentice was sent to finish his term in the service of the
Mercers Company, at Bruges. The London guilds whose names
remain to occasionally flit by as spectres from the past, were, in
Caxton's day, vigorous promoters of English commerce. Under
title of Merchant Adventurers, the English guilds jointly obtained
rights by charter, to supervise and control practical working of the
commercial treaty made between the Duke of Burgundy and England.
Their charter gave them power to elect governors having authority
to supervise and control English merchants trading with Burgundy;
and to make all trade regulations that were reasonable and within
treaty rights. No goods could leave Bruges for England without
the seal of the Governor of the Merchant Adventurers Co., who
received two pence for each parcel sealed. He appointed packers,
as merchants could not pack their own wares, lest prohibited goods
should be included; and he had power to call to his aid twelve
merchants and mariners, who collectively settled all commercial
disputes.

Caxton was at first member, then Governor of the Company of
Merchant Adventurers. During his Governorship the commercial

treaty long existing between Burgundy and England ended on November the 1st, 1465. Shortly before expiration of the treaty Caxton and an English diplomat were appointed Royal Commissioners to secure its renewal. They were unsuccessful, and the treaty lapsed. Philip of Burgundy refused to pass another treaty; English cloths were excluded from his dominions; and the English Parliament prohibited the importation of Flemish goods into England. For a time the merchants of both countries saved a part of their trade by smuggling goods indirectly through adjacent countries; but after a year the Earl of Warwick instructed Caxton to see that the act of the English Parliament forbidding English traders from buying goods in Burgundy was carried out. Philip, however, died in 1467, and his son Charles the Bold succeeded to the Dukedom. Edward the IV, of England, adroitly negotiated a marriage between his sister Margaret and the Duke. The wedding ceremonies were held at Bruges in 1468, and Caxton and his company soon after succeeded in obtaining a new commercial treaty.

It was in March, 1468, busy year as it was for him, that Caxton commenced his translation of the "Histories of Troy." When he had translated five or six quires the work was put aside, with no intention to resume it. But after a lapse of two years the Duchess Margaret sent for Caxton to speak with him on divers things, and he told her Grace of the translation he had begun. She bade him shew her what he had written, and, after reading it, she criticized his English, advised him to amend it, and commanded that the work should be finished. Accordingly Caxton's translation into English of the Histories of Troy, which he began at Bruges, and continued at Ghent, was finished at Cologne in the year 1471. At the end of the third book, he writes that his pen is worn and weary, eyes dim, ardour to work lessened, and that age was beginning to make his body feebler. As his book was promised to friends and others as soon as possible, he adds:—"I have practised and learned, at my great charge and dispense, to ordain this said book in print, after the manner and form as ye may here see; and it is not written with pen and ink as other books have been; to the end that every man may have them at once." The Troy-book was the first book printed in the English language. As forerunner of English printed literature, it will remain a sacred heir-

loom with the rarest treasures of English speaking people. It contains 351 printed leaves, and is nominally a history of the Trojan wars; but mixed up with that history are love stories, myths, and tales of knight errantry, written by Raoul le Fevre, chaplain and secretary to Philip Duke of Burgundy. These stories were popular at the ducal court. Blades says copies of Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy* are in fourteen libraries besides those of the British Museum, Oxford, Cambridge, Sion's College, and the College of Physicians, London. In 1812, the Duke of Devonshire paid £1,060 10s. for a copy of the *Troy book*.

The early printers made their types to resemble the manuscripts from which they printed, and the *Histories of Troy* were printed in a text similar to the handwriting of the time preserved in the records of the *Mercers' Company*. A manuscript written by Colard Mansion's own hand is in the *Paris National Library*; and an expert says "it is in exactly the same character as the types of Caxton's book." Colard Mansion was a fine manuscript writer at Bruges, and a member of one of the guilds for transcribers. He learned the art of printing about the time it was learned by Caxton, and without doubt he founded the types used by them both for printing their earlier books. The manufacture of manuscript books employed many craftsmen before the invention of printing. These formed themselves into guilds called after St. John, St. Luke, and other appropriate names. One of these guilds was called "*Les Frères de la Plume*." Their work found its way into the homes of cultivated nobles, and into all the courts of Europe. Philip, the Good, was fond of learning, and the best artists of Europe found their way to Bruges. His library was considered to be the richest in Christendom. It consisted of nearly 2,000 volumes, chiefly in vellum. They were most tastefully written and illuminated, and were kept in rich bindings, studded with gems and decorated with clasps of chased and jewelled gold. Many of these Ducal books are yet in the *Royal Library at Brussels*.

Caxton left his Governorship of the Merchant Adventurers, and for a time was a paid attache in the suite of the Duchess Margaret. From about 1472 to 1476 the *Troy Book* and the *Chess Book*, it is thought were printed at Bruges, by means of Mansion's technical skill, and Caxton's translations and money. Blades concludes that

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Mansion, afterwards without Caxton's co-operation, printed in French the "Troy Book," "Jason," and the "Meditacions," with similar types used for Caxton's two books. About 1476 a new font of types of slightly different character was brought into use by Mansion, and before Caxton took them with his printing outfit to England, they were tested by printing with them "The Quatre Derrenieres Choses." A year later Caxton had established an office in England. The "Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers" were printed by him at Westminster in 1477. It is the first book in which Caxton directly and plainly gives time and place of printing, and many think it is the first book he printed in England. Caxton's advertisement of "pyes," or guides to the Easter Feast and Saints' Days, has been preserved. It was issued soon after his arrival in England. In modern spelling it reads: "If it pleases any man, spiritual or temporal, to buy any 'pyes' of two or three commemorations of Salisbury use, printed after the form of this present letter, which is well and truly correct, let him come to Westminster in to the Almonry of the Red Pale and he shall have them good cheap." The words "Red Pale," beyond doubt, refer to the sign at his printing office; as their heraldic meaning is a vertical red band painted down the middle of a shield a third of its width, and many of the early printers took some heraldic device for a sign.

From 1476 till his death in 1492, for fifteen years, Caxton translated and printed books in England. Including his work on the Continent, he was engaged in printing less than twenty years. During that time, according to Knight, he printed sixty four books; but Blades, with fuller information, places the number of his works, including reprints, leaflets and small books at ninety-nine, without reckoning two or three that are doubtful. Many books printed by Caxton have no doubt been lost. Of those remaining, seven are fragments; and of thirty-one, but a single copy of each is left. "The Polychronicon" and "The Golden Legend" are the two books from Caxton's press less rare than the rest; of these, thirty copies of the one are preserved and thirty-one of the other. The British Museum possesses eighty-five Caxtons, more, as is seemly, than are in any other collection; but twenty-five of these are duplicates, and the fifty-six Caxtons collected by Earl Spencer are held to be the best and nearest complete collection made. After patient

investigation, Mr. Blades concludes that Caxton printed his books, come down to our time, from eight fonts of types, of five separate cuttings, made after three somewhat different styles of letters; for chronological convenience, in his life of Caxton, they are designated by numbers from one to six. Twelve of Caxton's books bear the imprint of his device and initials. The device was formerly thought, by a fanciful arrangement of Arabic numerals, to designate the year 1474; but similar characters have been found on the tomb of a member of the Mercers' Guild, and among the contraction symbols used in *Doomsday Book*. The seal used by him during his mercantile Governorship at Bruges likely suggested its use, and may have resembled it.

Of Caxton's chief printed works, besides the *Troy* and *Chess Books*, may be named:—The *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer; *Boethius*; *Reynard, the Fox*; *The Fables of Æsop*; *Chronicles of England*; *Higden's Polychronicon*, and the *Golden Legend*. Altogether he printed in England, excluding his work at Bruges, 18,000 pages, most of them of folio size; and of these 4,500 pages were translated by his own pen. In his will Caxton bequeathed for the benefit of his parish church fifteen copies of the *Golden Legend*. These sold at an average price of six shillings and eight pence a copy, a sum equivalent to about \$13 00 of modern money. That was not an exorbitant sum for a large illustrated book printed—as each of his books was—in a small edition. A luxurious edition, limited to 300 copies, of the same book as originally printed by Caxton, has been recently printed at the Kelmscott press of the poet Mr. William Morris. The price for the set of three volumes is £10 10s.

Caxton understood the French, Dutch and Latin languages, and wrote crisp, vigorous, idiomatic English. As first printer of English books, his work has received frequent comment, fair appreciation, and some criticism. In his address on history, Gibbon expresses regret that Caxton, forced to comply with the vicious taste of his readers, printed mawkish stories for the idle, and superstitious legends for the credulous; that the world is not indebted to England for a single first edition of a classic author; and that when the father of printing gave his patrons a work on history, instead of printing Higden's *Chronicle* in Latin, as he should have done, he only ventured

printed his books, in five separate styles of letters; for they are designated on his books bear the same as formerly thought, to designate the year on the tomb of a contraction symbols in during his mercantile use, and may have

the Troy and Chess books of Chaucer; Boecet; Esop; Chronicles of the Golden Legend. Alcock at Bruges, 18,000 these 4,500 pages were bequeathed for the Golden Legend. Six pence and eight pence a modern money. That book printed—as a luxurious edition, originally printed by the cotton press of the poet of three volumes is

Latin languages, and the first printer of English books. A fair appreciation, and Chaucer expresses regret at the taste of his readers, superstitious legends for the first time in England for a book. Instead of printing Higginson, he only ventured

on the English translation by Trevisa. Such criticism from Gibbon startled his readers, but did not change regard for Malory's Legends and Chaucer's Tales. It is singular that Gibbon should have underestimated Caxton's contributions to English literature, or the relative importance of his mother tongue. But the brightest mirror has some fleck, the human eye itself has its tiny blind spot; and Gibbon, to whom the secrets of the past stood revealed, so dimly foresaw the future of his own language, that, but for Hume, he would have written his history in French and not in English. The literary taste of our day is not that of the time of Gibbon. Our censors and guides think it singularly fitting that Caxton preferred his mother tongue, and did not turn his back on the perfect portraiture of English life and character furnished by Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims. German, Italian and French printers surpassed Caxton's work in mechanical niceties of the printer's art; but his shortcomings in those particulars were more than made up by special merit in other branches of his calling. He worked with persistent varied industry; and his books, printed in the everyday speech of the people, have become the corner stone of the foundation for a great literature. When his services are fairly appraised, none of his contemporaries in the printing art will be found to surpass him in merit. His name is interwoven with his country's history; and in his own words: "Other monuments distributed in divers changes endure but for a short time or season; but the value of history diffused and spread by the universal world, hath time, which consumeth all other things, as conservatrice and keeper of her work."

In the 126 years from the time Caxton printed the Troy Book to the year 1600 there were 365 printers in England and Scotland, or foreign printers who supplied England with books. During that time they printed ten thousand distinct works, an average of nearly 80 books a year. But the acorn, if slow to germinate, became a sturdy oak. The art "which has conferred immortality on the works of man" has grown with the spread of knowledge, kept in perfect touch with industrial invention, and has made art, chemistry, and mechanical science its handmaidens, ministering to its progress. In 1892, six thousand two hundred and fifty-four works were published in England; an average every four days of the number issued each year of the XVIth century. In the great libraries of the world books are

aggregated in such numbers that trained men are puzzled to care for them, to catalogue them, and make them accessible to readers. Special investigators of each branch of art, natural history and other sciences, have had for convenience sake to establish collections of books pertinent to their own pursuits. Brunet's Manual, a guide to only the best and rarest printed books, fills seven closely printed volumes of nearly 1,000 pages each; and the general trade catalogue of Mr. Quaritch, the bookseller, makes six full volumes, and sells for £12 12s.

Step by step, with increasing readers, the press acquired influence, and has become a great power permeating the entire ramifications of civilized life. Free institutions and crass ignorance are antagonistic. They cannot long subsist together, and for safety of the commonwealth popular governments dare not overlook the duty of public instruction. In discharge of educational functions, books play an important part, and books have few enemies in free countries. But no mere facility of reading books glibly can make men for truth, bravery, and devotion to duty, better than their more unlettered ancestry. Many a man with but little book learning has led a blameless life, and conferred untold benefits on his fellows, while thoughtless, selfish and depraved men, have made literature an instrument for their own destruction, and a stone of stumbling and cause of evil to others. No graces of genius countervail against the evils of a bad book, and exhalations from the moral filth of the world are more noxious to the soul than emanations from the deadliest plague centres are to the body. Books, like all blessings enjoyed by mortals, may be perverted and become a bane. Yet the harm fairly attributable to a free press, compared with its service is but as a drop to the ocean. He who has access to a good library holds a key, which used aright, will open caskets of richer treasures than are stored in the jewel chamber of an Eastern prince. No human agency has done more than has been done by books to make the world better, and none has added more to the sum of human happiness. Books are faithful untiring monitors, who, if consulted in a right spirit, will yield endless information in regard to the world we live in, give some conception of the great cosmos of which this world is but a part, and reveal truths of highest moment concerning the history, capabilities, responsibilities and destiny of man.

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